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ABSTRACT

Two crucial processes are discussed: (1) that through which social problems become public issues; and (2) that through which conflicts between competing diagnoses of, and responses to, publicly recognized social problems are resolved. Regularities in these transformations are conceptualized as follows: groups differ in their definitions of social problems according to self-interest, ideology, and social values. For a social problem to become a public issue, a complex political process develops around the activities of the media, officialdom and private interest groups. Similarly, conflicts arise among official authorities, underdog partisans, privileged partisans, policy planners, etc. as to how to respond to the problem. Various strategies for handling the conflicts are seen as generating significant political outcomes for the parties concerned and for the policy process. In sum, the paper serves to point out a whole area of important political considerations in the analysis of social problems. (TL)

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The analysis of social problems occurs in a political context. This paper begins a political analysis of how social problems are defined, how they are transformed into public issues, how they are subjected to competing analyses and how the conflict between interested parties over these divergent analyses may produce different effects on both people and policy. A process is thus envisaged based on the sequence: private or interest group recognition of the social problem; political recognition of the problem as an appropriate issue for public decision; public debate about the causes of the problem; a set of political outcomes of this sequence.

Private Recognition of a Social Problem

The concept of "social problem" applies when what an ideology designates as an ideal state of affairs, and what is perceived to be the reality, are thought to diverge. Accordingly, what at any time are generally labeled as social problems represent departures from social ideals that stem from dominant or sub-cultural ideologies. Unemployment, for example, is now a social problem because it denotes a state of affairs regarded as markedly less than ideal. In other centuries, it was not considered a problem because it violated no ideal conception of society. Recognition of a problem, however, does not necessarily denote a desire for broadly conceived change; this depends on one's interests and outlook. Thus one perception of a problem may imply a need for

"fine-tuning" a given status quo, while another may entail qualitative change (see Mannheim, 1936, for his distinction between ideology and utopia).

The perspective on social problems provided by the sociology of knowledge suggests linkages between problem perceptions and more or less stable constellations of social interest. In more pragmatic terms, different problem perceptions are held by different social groups. Economic class provides the most obvious examples. Thus, we expect, and find, a business view of unemployment and a labor view; a business view of inflation and a labor view. In any given social system, some views, attached to dominant interests, will tend to dominate problem definition. As American society defines the business of society as business, there tends to be a prevailing problem definition more consonant with the business view. The result is what the Italian Marxist Gramsci calls a capitalist "hegemony" in culture. (Gramsci, 1967)

The logic of the concept of social problem suggests that group differences in problem perceptions will originate, in part, from differences in social ideals. Groups diverge, then, in their conceptions of what is desirable for a "proper" or "good" social order, and this divergence may be quite innocent of conscious selfishness. Middle class views on alcohol, urban machine politics, the pattern of urban growth all contrast sharply, for example, with the working class and Catholic and minority perspectives on these matters (Gans, 1968). Two examples seem pertinent here. In The Urban Villagers (1962), Gans describes the South End of Boston as a relatively cohesive, satisfying social environment for its working class Catholic residents. By the formal definitions of the city and by federal urban renewal standards, however, the structures of that community were blighted. The structures were torn down, after belated

attempts to prevent this, and the residents dispersed to surroundings, sounder physically, but less satisfying socially. In a second example, Gusfeld (1963) analyses the Temperance Movement as a "symbolic crusade" by which Protestant middle class activists, through the symbolic victory of Prohibition, asserted their waning cultural dominance over the Catholic and urban minority challengers to their former hegemony. Simply put, what is a "problem" for one group, is a mundane part of life for another (cf. Mills, 1943).

Group differences in problem perceptions may not be attributed in a simple way solely to different social ideals. Perceptions of reality, the other component of problem perceptions, also provide a source of disagreement. Once more, interest and ideology make the connection between group cleavages on the one hand, and views about social regularities or facts, on the other. The prominent example is again economic. Working class and labor views of unemployment assume worker motivation and address themselves to the structure of opportunity -- or lack of it -- for work. Business views tend to emphasize more clearly the problem of motivation of the individual worker, the skills available to him or her, and take as open whether people would work if they were not forced to. The upshot is that the ostensible conflicts over facts and empirical generalizations which surround a given issue are frequently based upon at least two other aspects of problem definition: the self-interest of parties to controversies, and the values they may variously hold.

Some would, doubtless, query whether the process of assessing social reality need be as debatable and arbitrary as the present analysis might suggest. Indeed, the modern era offers the rhetoric of science and objectivity, and the scientific method, as a means to arbitrate many such disputes. If a critical experiment can be performed, or a definitive body of data collected, the

scientist, presumably, may say, "Regardless of one's position on the proposed policy, these are the facts of the matter, and I can prove it." Yet, in the process of social problem definition and social policy formation, face to face confrontation with disconfirming facts is not necessarily frequent or structured; and much survey and experimental work shows the lengths to which individuals will go in avoiding confrontation with such informational input. And, of course, social scientists, like other human beings, have their own value and interest investments which produce dissensus over many such empirical matters. For these reasons, social science is most often an inadequate tool for settling in any final or consensually satisfying way controversy with roots in long term interests or stable cleavages.

Public Recognition of a Public Issue

The transformation of a "social problem" in the minds of some individuals or a group into a widely recognized "public issue" requires a complex political process. Mills, we should note (1967, p. 8), developed a similar dichotomy between "personal trouble" and "public issue". Whereas his intent was to connote the more general insight to be gained from what he called the "sociological imagination," our present intent is to connote the mediation of a political process. The shift from private problem to public issue, from this perspective, involves several principal actors. They are considered here in turn.

The mass media prove critical in providing visibility to a potential issue. They also influence whether the problem is assigned legitimacy as a social issue or is discredited as illegitimate. Among other ways in which the media influence legitimacy, is the pointed inclusion or exclusion of certain

ostensibly critical pieces of factual information. Thus, if a news article reports that a study has shown deafening noise levels in a residential area near an airport, a reporter, or an editor, may make a point of interviewing a resident who doesn't mind the noise. Or if the community group has asked an expert to represent them at a hearing, a delegitimizing point may be made merely by giving the information that the expert does not live in the affected area. Legitimacy may be created, in similar manner, by following up a press conference, e.g., about rising unemployment with man-on-the-street interviews at the lines in front of a state unemployment compensation office.

Officialdom also participates in the shaping of social or public issues through its many spokesmen: aspiring politicians, elected officials, bureaucrats, the judiciary, etc. Missile gaps, the threat of communism and domestic subversion are all, as social issues, largely the creatures of official pronouncements. They are official images of the social order.

The media and public officials, of course, interact closely as determinants of social issues. Their relationship contains both important competitive and cooperative elements. Not surprisingly, the competitive aspect has proven more dramatic and, on occasions, even explosive. Especially in recent times, government has often taken the initiative in its conflict with the media. Witness the Nixon Administration's strategic attacks on the media, and both the Administration and Congressional challenge to CBS's documentary "The Selling of the Pentagon." Here, the Administration and its Congressional supporters successfully transformed the impact of the CBS documentary from that which might have created, or reinforced, the controversy about militarism in American society into a controversy about the alleged irresponsibility of the media. In the context of steady, if muted and implicit criticism of the conduct of

the War in Vietnam, the clash between media and government has indicated the vulnerability of the established media to government hostility.

Media and officialdom, nevertheless, far more frequently adopt a cooperative stance. The interests of government are more likely to be enhanced than to be frustrated by media activities. In particular, the media provide politicians with the channels of communication needed to proselytize official images and interpretations of social problems. Several factors are involved here. First, politicians may sometimes control media content by manipulating the flow of information to individual journalists. Reedy (1970) explains that the president has exclusive possession of news indispensable to the work of professional reporters, especially information about the president himself -- his thoughts, habits, likes and dislikes, etc. In return for "good" or "favorable" news stories, the president may dispense exclusive information to journalistic favorites. Politicians may control news, secondly, by overwhelming opposing views by the sheer news worthiness of official pronouncements. Writing in the New York Times (August 8, 1971), Tom Wicker illustrates this second process:

> "President Nixon's bitter anti-busing statement was circulated to millions last week by newspapers, radio and television. But it went almost unnoticed that the very next day the school superintendent of Harrisburg, Pa., refuted the Nixon position point by point, in an account of the actual experience of that city.
>
> This was a classic demonstration of the extent to which the American press -- print and electronic -- merely react to the statements of important officials rather than trying to make an independent judgment on the facts. Mr. Nixon's distortions were trumpeted in headlines, because he is President; the facts put forward by Dr. David H. Porter were ignored, because he was not 'newsworthy' enough."

Thirdly, even when the media officially place politicians in adversary positions, the opposition is more apparent than real. Thus, press conferences are

construed as forums for press criticism of government. Yet the norms of courtesy that constrain questions, the format of the conferences (e.g., no follow up questions), and the control exercised by the officials involved, all weight the outcome in favor of even a semi-alert government spokesmen.

The acquiescence of the media to the interests of government is, perhaps, best demonstrated by one example which includes all three factors: handing out the news selectively, stressing the news value of (and thus partially legitimating) official statements, and placing the opposition at a disadvantage. The case in question concerns how the late Senator Joseph McCarthy created a public issue of what he defined as a social problem by generating an atmosphere which assumed facts not actually present. McCarthy made a practice of releasing particularly explosive charges right before deadlines of afternoon or week-end editions of daily newspapers. This permitted many of his most outrageous charges to be printed, with few or no contending views, as his interlocutors were caught unaware. The media in turn, accepted, de facto, McCarthy's interpretation of newsworthiness. That is, they carried the charges and displayed them prominently. The interesting thing about the McCarthy example is that the newspapers of the early fifties gave one a sense of the high salience of the issue for the political system; and indeed, among the political elites, the issue of communism and subversion seems to have been one of hysterical acquiescence to McCarthy's interpretation of the issue. However, retrospective studies of the national polls and other studies of the dynamics of public opinion at the time indicate that, for most Americans, Communism was a very low priority issue in their decision-making; whatever data there are seem to indicate that McCarthy's influence lost his friends more votes than he gained for them. Yet, through a combination of charismatic

posturing, elite acquiescence, and most vitally, the status conferral function of the newspaper and media industry, the appearance of panic was able to skew the political system's response to the post-War era (Rogin, 1967).

Outside the jurisdiction of media and government, the role of private interests groups in labeling social issues should not be underestimated. Crenson (1970), for example, assembled evidence to show that industries with a reputation for power can prevent certain social problems from becoming social issues. Industry generally favors urban renewal (it can be made profitable) but resists pollution as social issues (it costs industry money). The more resources industry has available, the more they can influence what becomes a social issue.

Clearly, the transformation from social problem (privately recognized) to social issue (publicly recognized) has many determinants and defies precise statement at the moment. Two strategic resources, nevertheless, do seem critical in the contest over whose issues will gain a place on the public agenda. The first resource, legitimate authority, may stem from the charisma of office (for officials), of achievement (for businessmen), of expertise (for scientists, etc.), or of virtual representation (as in the role played by the late Dr. M.L. King). In ordinary language, these types of charisma form some of the bases of respect for the people whose words "count". The other sort of resources is more concrete, more material, more economic. It is the ability to impose one's view of an issue upon the public by virtue of one's position. Thus, in the Northwest corner of Indiana, Japanese steel is an issue because the steel companies make it one; because their agenda, by virtue of their resources, their power and their very existence, makes it everybody's issue.

Success in bringing a social problem to public attention does not always entail the ability to control the dominant definition of the problem. As Crenson (1970) noted recently and the politicial scientist Schattschneider (1960) did years ago, there is inherent risk in bringing an issue to a public arena. For, the more participants involved, the more various the interests, cultures, classes, and organizational bases of these participants, the more difficult it is for the originating party to maintain control of the definition of what is at stake. It is an indicator of great political power when a group is able to raise an issue and see it brought to some sort of resolution in the terms of definition originally proposed. That such attempts are regularly made and fail is an indicator of the critical nature definitions play in formation of alliances.

Conflicting Analyses of Social Problems

A variety of causal interpretations of social problems are always available. Elsewhere (Staines, 1971), the distinction between attributing a social problem to situational (or system) factors and blaming it on the persons involved is elaborated, and we alluded to it earlier while discussing unemployment. A large number of cognitive and psychological variables are shown to influence the choice of situational versus personal attributions.

In this paper, however, the concern lies with political determinants of attributional analyses of social problems. Various political actors and agencies, it may be argued, have strong political interests in selecting different types of attribution. Five classes of political actors will be considered in turn, as ideal types, with a consequent risk of exaggerating the attributional differences between them.

a) Authorities by virtue of "office."

Authorities in Gamson's (1968) terms have a political interest in justifying and maintaining their administration (which may be somewhat different from the social interests they "represent"). Specifically, they will want to show: that things are generally going well ("You've never had it so good"); that the problems that do exist are not the fault of the authorities or of the system but are created by aberrant behavior of some members of the polity; that their legitimacy is not in question and that challenges to their legitimacy stem from illegitimate sources. The ways in which such political interests are translated into personal attributions regarding social problems emerge most clearly in the context of some examples. Disorders and civil strife are generally blamed by authorities on undesirable personal qualities of those involved, either their leaders (professional revolutionaries, agitators) or their typical participants (criminals, misfits, dupes). Authorities deny fault in their system and thus deny reasonable grounds for protest, or for the existence of (or reason for) challenges to their legitimacy. According to authorities, crime is the work of criminals, not the product of poverty or oppression. Unemployment and poverty stem from a deficit of motivation (or virtue) and from malingering rather than from market and structural conditions.

Sometimes, however, authorities depart from definitions of social problems in person-blame terms. This is presently the case with liberal Democrats and moderate Republicans. Their rhetoric has gradually come to portray the conditions of blacks in more structural, system-blame terms (Kerner, 1968).

At least two reasons why authorities occasionally select systemic definitions of problems have been cited by political observers. A first interpretation construes this shift to system-blame in American rhetoric, especially about

race relations, as an indicator of long term changes. Certain authorities, that is, are beginning to acknowledge weaknesses of the system and the possible necessity for social change. Their altered views are part, from this perspective, of a general reversal for racism in American culture. Some observers assert, however, that when authorities select such systemic analysis, they become vulnerable to challenges from those portions of the public which they have purportedly been representing. While such authorities may be reacting to the delicate balance of social order in the cities, and to their consciences in some degree, they have committed themselves to a series of propositions not held by their white constituencies. In his conception of the "New Republican Majority," Kevin Phillips (1970) sees a shift of political allegiance, for example, of working class whites from the Democratic Party to the Republican Party, largely in response to unpopular and unacceptable Democratic attitudes to social problems. This, by the way, is a rather clear case of an empirical proposition designed to be a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The second explanation applies only to the systemic rhetoric of out-of-power elites such as the Democrats in the present period. These quasi-authorities tend to become much more system-blame oriented in their rhetoric and their oppositional proposals. They challenge the adequacy of the incumbents' world view, its linkages to policy, and its compassion for the plight of large masses of unblemished, but poorly treated people. However, once the "outs" have focused on a symbolic standard-bearer, e.g., their Presidential candidate, they will tend once again to contest on the basis of the personal attributes of their man versus the incumbent. Although presented as alternative explanations of system-blame by authorities, the two hypotheses cited may each be partially accurate.

b) Underdog Partisans

Underprivileged or low status partisans involved in a social problem have a political stake in system blame. By using external attributions, underdogs avoid the self-blame and inertia which no social or political movement can tolerate and they place the problem at the doorstep of the authorities with a demand for speedy official action: social movements involving American blacks blame white racism, institutional racism, racial discrimination, structural poverty and unemployment, defective housing and education for the plight of their constituency. The movement for women's rights charges sex discrimination and tries to undermine explanations of income differentials in terms of innate sex differences.

c) Privileged Partisans

Privileged partisans take two tacks; first, as in the previously cited case of business groups, they attempt to deny that a problem is an appropriate one for public decision. In our social system, this first line of defense against encroachment on privilege will frequently involve the prerogatives of private enterprise and property. For example, it was decades before the right of the state to force nondiscrimination in privately owned public facilities was consensual enough to become statutory; and it is still not consensual enough to be enforced.

The second tack of more privileged partisans is similar to that frequently taken by authorities. They urge the perspective that personal characteristics of subpopulations, usually the less than equal, are responsible for disturbing behavior. Thus, either problem behavior cannot or should not be handled by the state, or the state should focus programmatically on bringing specified groups of individuals up to standard.

d) Staff Roles: Policy advisors and planners

While policy advisors and planners have clear ties with the authorities, their special concerns and interests justify an independent category. Advisors may decide to handle a social problem via suppression. They may, that is, deny that it exists in significant proportions, suppress information about it and harrass the partisans involved. In such cases of suppression, policy advisors will keep their causal analysis of a social problem in line with the person-blame orientation of authorities.

Frequently, however, suppression cannot be justified on strategic grounds (i.e., it won't work), and staffers and planners feel obliged to take more positive action. Ameliorative action may move their attributions in the direction of the system-blame perspective of relevant partisans but not so far that they discredit the administration of their political bosses.

Policy advisors and planners also share certain bureaucratic interests. Three points of critical concern to a bureaucratic organization are: who needs their help, what sort of help, how much? Each point shapes the actions of a bureaucracy. Thus an agency (and indeed a profession) may acquire legitimacy by defining a group of persons in need of its product. Professionals, after all, have the power to say what is wrong with you. With a person attribution, a mental health agency may, for example, transform an individual into a patient and thus justify its own intervention and control.

On the second point, agencies may even be concerned to define the problem so that action by them is appropriate while interventions by rival agencies would be inappropriate (cf. Lennard and Bernstein, 1971). Marris and Rein (1969) cite the example of competition in 1960 between two federal bureaucracies -- NIMH and the Children's Bureau -- for funds from a Congress increasingly

alarmed at the rise in delinquency:

> "NIMH was seeking to develop a policy of comprehensive community action projects, aimed at the complex social causes of delinquency... The Children's Bureau hoped that new legislation would grant it a statutory authority equal to its rival through which it could promote technical assistance, studies, and demonstrations of new methods of correction."

This bureaucratic rivalry was bypassed by the formation of the President's Committee on Juvenile Delinquency and Youth Crime. The Children's Bureau was rebuffed since the committee, under Lloyd Ohlin's influence, opted for a preventive strategy rather than emphasis on professional training or experiments in the treatment of delinquents.

In terms of their third bureaucratic interest, agencies may, via their pronouncements, vary the size of their problem and thus justify their requests for money and manpower. Lennard and Bernstein (1971, p. 309) explain that "...the more persons are defined as 'mentally ill,' the more manpower is needed in the mental health field." The FBI and the Defense Department, nevertheless, remain the masters of the manipulation of problem size--crime waves and missile gaps are announced in fine accordance with the timing of basic budgetary and political needs.

The theoretical problem entailed in predicting the attributions of public agencies is rather complex. Agencies must, in part, look backwards. They must justify what they have done previously. A personal attribution for a social problem may thus permit them to mark down a program's failure to the extensive pathology of the target group rather than any short-sightedness in the planning and execution of their own programs (cf. Caplan, 1971). On the other hand, bureaucratic agencies must also be forward looking. The theorist should be able to chart the strategic needs of the agency as perceived by its effective leadership; that is, different needs of the moment may entail different

predilections for attribution. An agency head, for example, in a city with a black majority and a black mayor given to the rhetoric of black pride, is not apt to be too outspoken about the alleged weakness of the black family. But there are, of course, other factors besides internal agency exigencies. Governmental agencies tend to build up stable client relations with stable interest groups (Lingwood and Ross, 1971). While some of these, for example the privileged partisans in a controversy in which they relate closely to a city renewal agency, may contend in favor of person-blame, other clients of other agencies may contend for system-blame attribution. Thus, not only a knowledge of the agency needs, but also an analysis of client demands, power, and their interactions, are necessary for prediction of agency attribution.

e) Ideologues

Political ideologues have vested interests in certain attributions. As a general rule, conservatives stress personal causes of social problems, and liberals and radicals favor situational or structural analyses. This is only a rule of thumb of course. There are ideological conservatives who blame overzealous government intervention for many of our problems, for instance, as the political scientist Edward Banfield (1968) does. And there are liberals beyond number who blame black people for their victimization in the schools through such formulations as cultural deprivation (Ryan, 1971).

While ideological arguments often reflect genuinely held viewpoints, they are also used, especially in politics, as a more palatable and attractive cover for political interests. "Freedom of choice" in the South is a thin ideological veneer for the desire for all white schools. Evidence for a purely instrumental use of ideologies may arise in cases of inconsistency. People, that is, may discard or reverse an ideological position when it no

longer meets a situational need. President Nixon, for example, calls himself a strict constructionist but his Administration's policy of indiscriminate arrests in the May Day demonstrations in Washington demonstrated that strict constructionism was an expedient ideological shield for his conservative views. His interest in strict constructionism is limited to cases in which this legal doctrine generates conservative conclusions as it does when applied to the bolder liberal decisions of the Warren Court. Instrumental use of ideology is not confined to conservatives. William F. Buckley, Jr. correctly observes that liberals have "rediscovered democracy" in connection with the Vietnam War. Anti-war spokesmen were not citing the polls when they formed a minority but now claim that the fact that "the majority of the American people want out of Vietnam" is a major reason why the administration should extricate American forces from the war. Thus, while some ideological commitments to personal versus situational attributions may extend beyond considerations of interest, many which purport to, do not.

Outcomes of Conflict between Diagnoses

Since causal diagnoses of social problems are reached by different people in different political situations, conflict between alternative patterns of attribution becomes inevitable. Ordinary citizens may disagree among themselves, as may members of government. Indeed, the controversial nature of problem diagnosis suggests one important reason why social problems so often become public issues.

Of particular interest here is the conflict over problem diagnosis between, on the one hand, governmental actors and agencies including policy advisors and planners and, on the other, the target population involved in the social problem. The conflict usually involves some mixture of confrontation and bargaining.

Confrontation begins when competing diagnoses of the social problems are announced publicly. Authorities may, for example, announce that an urban or prison disorder represents a criminal riot (personal attribution). Underdog spokesmen answer back -- it was a political rebellion in response to oppression and repression (situational attribution). The confrontation may occur directly or indirectly.

If direct, the two sides attack each other and one may win out. The government may disparage its opposition publicly, put them in jail (or, if in jail, abuse or isolate them), harrass them, etc., and thus eliminate the rival view by eliminating the rivals. For their part, the target group may raise the level of disorder to intolerable levels, gather widespread public support and force a change in policy. The ultimate step is, of course, overthrow of the government.

Indirect confrontation may occur instead of, or in addition to, direct confrontation. Here persuasive appeals are directed at the rest of the population by both the authorities and the target group. Usually, the target group has raised the issue and presented its definition. The authorities may simply offer an alternative definition to the same problem. Or, in a more subtle move, they may try to shift the issue. In the aftermath of the Attica prison disorder, several issues have challenged the original, official interpretation of what was at stake, namely, disorderly and rebellious behavior by prisoners. Prison security and protection of guards, conditions of prisoners, for example, may deflect attention from the cause of the uprising. Likewise, as noted, the government has tried to make media performance, not militarism, the central issue raised by the movie, "The Selling of the Pentagon." What marks off confrontation between authorities and partisans, however, is not the use of specific tactics (e.g., direct or indirect) but the absence of compromise between the parties.

A further possibility which may follow confrontation involves implicit or tacit bargaining. At issue are the differences in problem diagnosis and the substantive aspects of the social problems. Each side brings power resources to the bargaining process. The authorities may offer the partisans a situational interpretation of problem behavior. Turner (1969), for example, argues that the authorities may agree to regard an urban disorder as a social protest, thus conferring legitimacy and some popular acceptance on the actions of the target group in the minds of the public at large. From the alternative standpoint of sanctions, the authorities may publicly attack the legitimacy of the target group and raise the specter of backlash. If the authorities decide to press for a personal attribution, they may draw upon descriptive and normative cultural myths. The term myth does not mean illusion here -- there are true myths and false ones. Rather, myths refer to global propositions which play vital symbolic roles in the political culture of a people. Relevant descriptive person-blame myths about the way American society operates include: Horatio Alger, and the openness of opportunity; the efficacy of education for career advancement, and so on. There is an element of truth in these mythic formulations, to be sure. But the role they play in negotiation is always to put the final burden of proof on the less than equal. On the normative side, equality of opportunity to all the education a person may fruitfully use, for example, has become the more or less publicly accepted rhetoric of urban managers. Willhelm (1970) has pointed out that equality of opportunity in an economy depending on declining amounts of unskilled labor, and escalating amounts of technical skill, provides a superb way both to end discrimination and to do away with the possibility of achievement of equality between the races. Beyond their symbolic strategies, authorities also have at

their disposal economic resources and action programs that may be promised to the target group.

In their turn, the underdog partisans involved bring to the bargaining process the capacity to make trouble and agitate as well as the support and sympathy of allied groups. But cultural myths, too, may also act as resources for the less than equal, as is illustrated by an examination of the speed with which two recent social movements have developed. The first is the movement for racial equality and black liberation, and the second is the women's liberation movement.

In the first instance, of course, Myrdal's formulation (1944) is very much to the point. Except for the deep South, nowhere in America was classic, genetic racism a legitimate social ideology with which to respond to black demands for equality. Little by little, the definitions of system blame have gained currency. Individualism is now the last line of ideological resistance to black demands for compensatory or egalitarian programs. One of the resources which has helped in the intense struggle of the Sixties has been those parts of the mythic structure of America which took equality of opportunity as a real condition; when confronted with clear instances of normative inconsistency, we saw change accelerate. The weakness, of course, of this aspect of change in the political system is that it works as long as the system perceives the demand as one within the consensus. Since the condition of black people is in many ways unprecedented, and the corrective modes more radical, the system has taken to creating pariahs of those groups who take the logical, but fateful steps outside the pale of that consensus. Thus, the Kerner Commission (1968) attacks white racism and various structural conditions of life in the ghetto, but the Justice Department persecutes the Black Panthers with terrible vengeance.

Similar observations may be made of the women's movement. Almost nowhere in officialdom can outright genetic arguments about women's inferiority be made, despite some talk of the relevance of genetic "differences." There is little or no moral ground for antagonists to stand on in resisting equal pay for equal work or other apparently commonsensical demands. Consequently, the movement has been able to literally explode, holding terrific moral power wherever it focuses its efforts. In a certain sense, the women's movement has cornered the moral resource market on a number of issues. However, when it moves beyond the consensual American myth of equality within the nuclear family and challenges such sacred concepts as marriage, lady-like behavior, women as sex objects, the nuclear family itself, etc., the movement cannot gain the same momentum for its own version of what a really free situation would be like. As a movement for cultural consistency it is powerful; as a movement for cultural change it is controversial.

When authorities and partisans focus their respective resources on bargaining, the ensuing process includes, in addition to negotiation over material and more substantive matters, a process that Scheff (1968) terms reality negotiation, that is, negotiation about the problem diagnosis or correct attribution. The compromise on attributions may be achieved via different routes: a heterogeneous but official commission (e.g., the Kerner Commission) to define the social problem, cooptation by the authorities of some of the target group -- often more "moderate" leaders, or a decision to refer the issue to a third party (e.g., the judiciary). While the post-bargaining positions entail agreements (or more nebulous "understandings") about future behavior and economic promises, they may contain only partial concessions on attributional issues regarding social problems. The final and public attributional positions

of the parties, if not identical, may be much closer than their initial viewpoints, since the authorities and partisans may agree to disagree on diagnostic questions but not too much. The analogous disputes of labor and management illustrate some aspects of the bargaining process. Prior to recognition of unions, the two parties engaged in frequent and intense conflict. Management, at least, denied the legitimacy of labor as a bargaining partner. With the present procedures for negotiation, economic deals or packages are agreed upon and attributional positions are closer than before but not identical. Labor and management acknowledge each other's legitimacy but disagree, for instance, over whether inflation is attributable to price-increases (labor) or wage-increases (management). In this case, the availability of distributable resources, and the institutionalization of the process, act so as to <u>defuse</u> potentially explosive conflict.

The result of the conflict between the authorities and the target group may generate significant outcomes for both parties and the policy process. The authorities may gain political stability and a cessation of challenges to their legitimacy. The target group may gain official resources and, in the case of agreed to situational attributions, influence over official decisions. If they compromise on an attributional pattern, though, the members of the target group may be affected. Thus an acceptance of a person-blame diagnosis as part of a negotiated deal may encourage self-blame and hence self-hatred in the group. Some experimental evidence uncovers the political dangers of these negative self-attributions. Costanzo (1970), using children as experimental subjects, has demonstrated a relation between self-blame and conformity to peer pressure. The finding suggests that authorities, who can induce underdog partisans to internalize negative labels and blame themselves, may also command, on the part

of disadvantaged citizens, conformity to the wishes of authorities. On the other hand, if the target group can force acceptance of a system-blame orientation, it can elevate the self-esteem of members and hence their political efficacy, aspirations, and activism.

The policy outcomes of the conflict are specified less easily. One hypothesis ties policy effectiveness to the accuracy of the problem diagnosis. Thus, if inordinate emphasis is assigned to personal factors in the diagnosis of a social problem, the resulting politics and programs will founder against situational impediments unacknowledged in the diagnosis, e.g., many juvenile delinquency programs (Powers and Witmer, 1951). Other hypotheses about problem diagnosis and policy output may be ventured: e.g., situational diagnoses may lead to more policy, more programs and greater outlay of official resources (cf. the widespread view that political liberals in government institute more social programs than their conservative counterparts).

This paper has moved over the surface of a number of disciplines and problems, perhaps too rapidly. We hope it serves the modest purpose of pointing out a whole area of important political considerations in the analysis of social problems. It has indicated a series of points at which the transformation of problem to issue may be effected, and it has suggested who might make or resist those attempts, and how. Some critics may contend that the definitional process is <u>not</u> as potent as we suspect, and that the larger forces of class structure, class interest and class power work their way through the political and cultural process regardless of these, perhaps microprocesses. On the other hand, if the notion of a class "hegemony" in culture (Gramsci, 1967) does have validity, then our review should be consistent with it. The next time our readers hear the phrase welfare state, for example, it is our intention that they should ask, "whose?"

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